



# **STRATEGIES, TECHNIQUES, APPLICATIONS AND RESOURCES**

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## **Conspiracy of Silence against Women: A Study of *Behind the Veil***

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### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to examine how bodies of women have been colonized with reference to Rasheed Jahan's play *Behind the Veil* (*Parde ke Peeche*). Jahan is concerned with the 'conspiracy of silence' against women and her writings on issues of female sexuality, abortion, women's health and diseases etc. made her an iconic figure. The emergence of women writers like Rasheed Jahan and others on the Indo-Anglian literary horizon is of tremendous significance since she highlights the unexplored sexuality in *Angare* which was earlier a taboo & explores the case of marginalization and exclusion due to which she was labeled 'angareywali'. She raises a voice against sexism to express victim-victimizer clash since the documentation of creative capacities of women can free them from the status of the victim. The predicament of Muhammadi Begum is depicted in her one act play wherein she uses pen as the palisade to subvert the all-pervasive patriarchy.

**Keywords:** Silence, sorority, body-colonization, docile bodies

### **1. Introduction**

Dr. Rashid Jahan is one of the pioneers of radical writings on women's issues. In 1922 Rashid Jahan entered Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, as a science student. Here she first devoted time to writing, and her first published effort was a short story in English, "Salma," which appeared in the college journal Chand Bagh Chronicle in 1923 or 1924. Graduating in 1924, she entered Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi, during which time she continued to write, but mostly in Urdu. While in medical school she also continued her interest in the theater by staging her adaptation of the famous love story of Princess Lala Rukh. She received her M.B.B.S. degree, with specializations in Gynecology and Obstetrics, in 1929 and immediately entered the Provincial Medical Service of United Provinces. Her first medical position was in Kanpur. In 1931 she was posted to Lady Dufferin Hospital, Lucknow, and it was here that she became involved with the coterie of young writers who would eventually become famous, or infamous, in Urdu literature as the Angare Group: Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar and, of course, Rashid Jahan herself. She emerged as a prominent feminist writer of 20th century as she made a pioneering inroad into the literary public sphere. She highlights the unexplored sexuality which was earlier a taboo in *Angare* & explores the case of marginalization and exclusion.

### **2. Predicament of Women in *Behind the Veil***

Rashid Jahan's play deals with the predicament of all those women who are the victims of brutality. They are constrained to live in 'attics' of emotional desolation, allowed to venture out only upto the 'courtyards' of domesticity. Jahan in her write-up displays a desire to find access to the horizon of self definition/realization, warding off the veils and shadows of repression. Her pen worked as an instrument to shear the purdah. The play is a deeply moving account of women who carry their sufferings on their shoulders.

We all know that men and women have different kinds of experiences and their expression of writing is even more different. In traditional societies women have been constrained by social constructs and have been divided into family units, relating to outside world through their men, being governed by their positions. How have they coped with these subordinated positions, or lack of communication or the failure of their dreams? And how have they defined themselves, honed their languages, related to society?

The answer is women have turned to writing and found both sanity and self-expression through it. When men and women narrate the same thing, the perspectives, the images, comparisons are different since they are two different kinds of articulations and voices. This is all because of the male gaze so women need to shake off this hold. She must find the voice which is free from this gaze or she must find a space outside this frame. It is believed that men can become aggressive and revengeful in writing but women have to be preservers of sanctity even in writing. When Rasheed Jahan breaks from those constraints and throws light on the ruthlessness of men, people labeled her as 'angareywali' who has no right to live because she as a 'woman' writes of the harsh reality. Men regard women as the mere 'body' without emotions or feelings and they act mercilessly when it comes to acting as consumers of the feminine bodies.

Jahan's uninhibited frankness in writing led people to call her 'witch' since it highlights the nature of men that they are free to have as many women as they want. Marriage is the ultimate destiny reserved for girls and after marriage, the goal is to prove oneself as a productive wife, caring mother, and capable gratifier of